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Approved For Release 2000/05/31 : CIA-RDP86T00608R000200010048-8

New Leaders Fed. Mil. Gov. of Nigeria

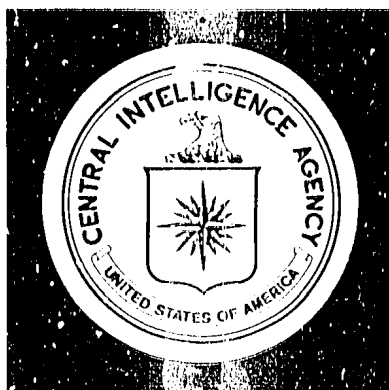
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*The New Leaders of the
Federal Military Government of Nigeria*

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September 1975

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Classified by 004050
Exempt from General Declassification Schedule
of E.O. 11652, exemption category:
§ 5B(1), (2), and (3)
Automatically declassified on:
date impossible to determine

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PREFACE

During the first 5 years after Nigeria gained its independence on 1 October 1960, tribal chauvinism and widespread corruption dominated the country's politics. Nigeria, with 80 million people, is the most populous nation in Africa and has nearly 250 tribes. The three major ethnic groups are the Muslim-dominated Hausa-Fulani in the North, the mainly Christian Yoruba in the West, and the predominantly Christian Ibo of the East (the Biafrans of the Nigerian civil war).

On 29 July 1966 a bloody military coup fired by tribal animosity brought Gen. Yakubu Gowon to power. Exactly 9 years later, on 29 July 1975, a bloodless military takeover deposed Gowon, who, in the intervening years, had led his country through a bitter 3-year civil war and then through one of the shortest and least acrimonious periods of national reconciliation in history.

After the war Gowon turned his attention to the international scene and seemed complacent about the domestic situation. He enjoyed the role of an African statesman, and he spent more time developing intra-African relations than building an economically sound Nigeria. Gowon served for a year (1973-74) as head of the Organization of African Unity, and Nigeria joined OPEC and organized a community of West African States. Against the advice of many of his senior advisers, Gowon refused to face the burgeoning economic and social problems at home.

In early 1975 Nigeria embarked on a massive 5-year development program. Based on the country's enormous oil revenues (nearly nine billion dollars in 1974, 37 percent of which came from crude oil sales to the United States), the plan is designed to transform the oil-rich agricultural country into a sophisticated industrial nation. By that time, however, the country was a shambles: In January 1975 Gowon had acceded to the demands of the civil servants and given pay increases of up to 133 percent. Within 6 months inflation surged to between 30 and 80 percent—a giant leap for any country that has only a 2 percent yearly agricultural growth. There was massive congestion in the ports and shortages of food and consumer goods. The gasoline distribution system broke down, and transportation came to a standstill. There were widespread strikes and a wave of walkouts in public services that left the country without adequate water and power supplies for weeks at a time.

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In January and February 1975 student demonstrators, angry over Gowon's recent announcement that he would be unable to keep his longstanding promise to return the country to civilian rule by 1976, forced the three universities to shut down. Bribery, always an accepted way of life in Nigerian business, became blatant among military and government officials. Many of Gowon's military comrades bridled at his failure to purge the army of corrupt officers, especially among the military governors of the 12 states. On 29 July 1975, in a broadcast to the nation, Col. Joseph N. Garba, commander of Gowon's elite bodyguard and his closest friend, announced on behalf of the Nigerian Armed Forces that General Gowon had been ousted.

Thirteen hours later Brig. Murtala R. Muhammed was named the new Head of State. At the same time, five new senior military and police commanders were announced. All five had previously been personally and politically loyal to Gowon.

Upon taking office Muhammed swept away the entire military hierarchy by retiring everyone above the rank of major general. He also named a new 22-man Supreme Military Council, which legally holds all executive and legislative powers; 12 new state military governors; new commanders for the



THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL

First Row: Insp. Gen. M. D. Yusufu (L-2), Brig. Olusegun Obasanjo (L-3), Brig. Murtala R. Muhammed (L-4), Brig. Theophilus Y. Danjuma (L-5), Comdr. Michael A. Adelanwa (L-6) and Col. John Yisa-Doko (L-7). Third Row: Col. Joseph N. Garba (L-1)

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three army divisions; and 25 new Federal Commissioners to run the government Ministries. His choices for all of these posts cut across tribal lines and showed a healthy ethnic balance. In order to dispel the fear of dominance by the Northern states, he annulled the controversial 1973 census, which had shown a huge increase in Northern population figures, and, for planning purposes, reverted to the 1963 census figures.

The new leaders of Nigeria are young, well-trained, energetic military men who were successful in leading their troops to victory in the civil war. They now face the challenge of guiding their country toward successful economic development.

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